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Kim, K. (2016) Editorial. *Mission Studies*, 33(3), pp. 245-247.

## **Editorial**

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By the time you receive this issue of *Mission Studies*, the 14th Assembly of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS) will have already taken place in Seoul, South Korea. The theme of the 2016 assembly was “Conversions and Transformations: Missiological Approaches to Religious Change”. It started from the observation that, “No matter what the goal of mission activity is considered to be, mission aims at transformation of some sort”. However, the nature of the transformation brought about by Christian mission is contested: the conference call acknowledged that it is rarely “purely spiritual” but also has social, cultural, political and other dimensions.

The outcomes of the transformations brought about by Christian mission are controversial. Some are more politically acceptable than others. Community development, embrace of human rights, overcoming conflict, and care for the environment are all examples of change that is welcomed by the international community. However, some other missional goals – such as church planting, public evangelizing, calling for moral reforms, and prophetic challenge to injustice – may be thought undesirable and resisted in different environments. Resistance may also be due to the controversial methods some Christian communities employ, their misguided aims, or perceptions of Christian self-promotion and self-interest. In

addition, resistance may be caused by real worries about threats to family unity, social cohesion or national sovereignty, for example, and not only by unwillingness to accept criticism, fear of change, or anti-religiosity.

As the conference call recognised, the issue of conversion – a traditional goal of much Christian missionary activity – is the most contentious part of the mission agenda, especially where this is seen to involve leaving one religious community and joining another. Religious change, as viewed from theoretical, theological, ethical and practical perspectives, should occupy a central place in the field of mission studies. However, although it has been dealt with by social studies, psychology, philosophy, developmental studies, and other disciplines, to date it has received relatively little attention by missiologists and Christian mission theologians. This lacuna is one of the main reasons that the topic of conversions and transformations was chosen for IAMS 2016. Moreover, the context of the Association gave the opportunity to transcend historical or denominationally specific approaches in tackling it. This quadrennial assembly, like others before it since 1972, created a space for critical and constructive dialogue among scholarly disciplines, different Christian traditions and varying contextual backgrounds. A particular strength of IAMS conferences is the inclusion of voices from the majority world through a system of bursaries.

The topic of religious conversion and transformation is of double significance for mission studies because, as the call for papers recognised, the way Christians perceive its nature influences the ways they relate to other Christians, and to people of other faiths and no faith. In this light, it was important for the IAMS Assembly to tackle the origins of the ideas, models and impulses that abound in the Scriptures and the different Christian traditions about the types of religious change to be followed and those that are rejected. Furthermore, the

opportunity to engage with the context of South Korea, which is arguably one of the most genuinely multi-religious societies, added deeper insights into the experience and reality of religious change.

Given the contexts of both Korea and also inter-religious issues, it is especially appropriate that this issue of *Mission Studies* begins with an obituary to a Korean pioneer of Christian-Muslim relations, Dr. Chun Chae-Ok, who was also a former president of IAMS. There are six varied papers in this full issue. Two of them deal directly with conference themes. An example of the contentious nature of religiously-motivated change is furnished by Tomas Sundnes Drønen, who scrutinises unpublished material from French colonial archives from Cameroon that show how the administration carefully watched the work of Christian missionaries from Norway. Drønen's work reveals that this surveillance was due to the active stance against domestic slavery taken by the Norwegians in the name of human rights. This was seen as a threat to political stability, which was maintained by respect for local traditions and strict control over religious activities. Conversion is the subject of Mechteld Jansen's article, which begins from the observation that missiology has tended to deal with the topic as religious response to the divine call, whereas in secular terms it is explained socio-economically. Using the heuristic lens of two contemporary post-secular missiologists, Jansen finds that conversion remains valid in post-secularity as a new form of commitment and belonging, and that the religious and secular are entangled in it in complex contextual ways.

Two papers take a historical approach to mission. The shift in South Korea and the United States from "foreign mission" to "world mission" is traced by William Yoo through analysis of the sermons of one the most revered Korean Protestant pastors – Reverend Kyung-Chik

Han. Yoo shows how after the liberation from Japan in 1945, American Presbyterian missions underwent an “uneasy transition” as South Korea developed as a world leader in missions and migrant churches in the USA challenged the indigenous churches there. The Universities’ Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) is the focus of the article by Maimbo W. Mndolwa and Fergus King, who examine the paradoxical role UMCA played in the move towards independence in Tanganyika. Due in part to circumstances beyond its control, UMCA churches lacked African leadership. Nevertheless, such was the value given to African experience by the mission that Christians formed in the UMCA tradition would go on to take key roles in government and embrace the African philosophy of *Ujamaa* (Unity) over narrow Anglo-Catholicism.

The last two articles relate to recent mission statements. With reference to Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Norlan Julia shows how the introduction of popular religious practices from the Philippines helped to sustain Filipino migrants living and working in Norwich, United Kingdom. Far from the comforts and certainties provided by a predominantly Catholic culture at home, popular piety functioned powerfully to gather the migrants into a dynamic ecclesial community that provides support amidst crisis and accompanies them in both their faith and migrant journeys. David Starling questions the approach of “finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in” that characterises the World Council of Churches document *Together towards Life*. His study of the key pneumatological themes of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans shows “a close connectedness between the Spirit’s life-giving work and the saving righteousness manifested in Christ, proclaimed in the gospel, and at work within the church”, which Starling believes precludes seeking out and joining in with cultural impulses and social movements beyond the church.

There are two new developments to note in this issue. First, we welcome Dr. Atola Longkumer as book reviews editor. She takes over from Dr. Paul Kollmann, who has given more than a decade of service, and to whom I would like to express grateful thanks both personally and on behalf of the journal. Second, from this issue onwards, Mariel Deluca Voth and Sharlee Xiaoli Yang will be providing translations of the article abstracts in Spanish and Chinese respectively to increase our global reach. We look forward to publishing the plenary papers from the Seoul IAMS Assembly in the first issue of 2017, and in the four years until the next conference we will be following up the issues raised about conversions and transformations.